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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002708

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DEPARTMENT FOR DRL, AF/W AND AF/RA
AF/W FOR PARKS, EPSTEIN
DRL FOR TOMLYANOVICH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2006
TAGS: [PINS](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: REPORTS OF ARMY ATTACKS ON TIV IN BENUE

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter, reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (U) Summary: According to several sources, the Army is reported to have destroyed several villages in Eastern Benue and killed an undetermined number of people in an apparent reprisal for the murder of nineteen soldiers October 12. Troops apparently destroyed the house of former Chief of Army staff Victor Malu, killing several family members. In apparent response to the military action, a demonstration by Tiv students at the University of Makurdi turned violent when the students attacked a police station in the city. Eyewitnesses report at least ten killed in that incident, which was eventually quelled by the police. End Summary.

¶12. (C) A number of private and public sources are reporting these events. We cannot now state that these reports are completely true. However, that we are getting similar renditions from a variety of independent sources lends credibility to the general account of events. A picture is emerging that indicates multiple military actions against civilians in Benue State, resulting in the destruction of several villages and the deaths of over 100 people. Eyewitnesses who fled the destruction, as well as Tiv leaders, have reported to BHC and Embassy officials that Army units entering Benue from Taraba state on Monday evening, began targeting ethnic Tiv villages. The informal Tiv militia have been accused of the October 12 killings of Army soldiers in Benue. Troops are reported to have killed residents of Gbeji, and Vaase, villages in the Ukum Local Government Area in eastern Benue, before razing them. After destroying the village of Anyin, troops went to Zaki-Biam, where they levelled former Chief of Army Staff Victor Malu's residence, allegedly killing his grandmother and five other members of his household in the process. A high ranking military officer denied that Army troops have killed anyone in Benue State, and said there were other security forces (SSS, informal militia) which may be responsible for any deaths (see DAO septel).

¶13. (C) Tivs have flooded into Makurdi from the affected areas, adding to nearly 60,000 co-ethnics who were previously displaced from their homes in neighboring Nasarawa and Taraba states. In reaction to the killings, students at the predominantly Tiv University of Makurdi staged a demonstration which generated a riot when students attacked a police station, according to a BHC source with direct access. The police responded with tear gas and fired weapons above the students' heads. One Amcit eyewitness reported seeing at least 10 charred bodies after the demonstration was over. It is not clear whether the bodies were police, students or both.

Background

¶14. (C) The nineteen soldiers were reportedly kidnapped and killed by an armed band of Tiv youth, who dismembered and severely mutilated the soldiers' bodies. The soldiers had been deployed to the border area to maintain order between feuding Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups. Senator Daniel J. Saror, and Representative Gabriel Suswam, both Tivs who represent the area affected by the military action, met Ambassador Jeter October 24 to present their perspective and to request USG assistance in stopping the violence assisting what they claim may be over 500,000 internally displaced persons. Both men claimed that the October 12 deaths were the result of a battle of Tiv militia against soldiers and Jukun militia wearing army uniforms who had burned a Tiv village. The Tiv militia prevailed in the ensuing firefight, killing the soldiers and Jukun militia members. It was widely reported in the press that the President and the Army had called upon Tiv leaders to "turn over" the perpetrators or face a possible military action.

15. (C) The capture and murder of these soldiers was the latest incident in a series of conflicts involving the Tiv and their ethnic neighbors in Nasarawa, Benue and Taraba states. According to the Nigerian ethnic calculus of the indigene/settler, Tivs are regarded as interlopers by the "indigenous" ethnic groups in Nasarawa and Taraba, even though they migrated into central Nigeria many years ago and are the largest ethnic group in Benue State. Disputes over land and access to state resources break out with some frequency; there is an historical record of Tiv/Jukun disputes that spans most of the 20th Century. The current cycle began in southeastern Nasarawa state June 12 when an Azara chieftan was assassinated, purportedly by a group of local Tiv (Reftel). The Azara are allies of the Jukun, at least when it comes to resisting Tiv "encroachment." Hundreds may have been killed in the ensuing conflict, which was eventually stopped by the military, with nearly 30,000 Tiv migrating south to Benue State. Later in July, the conflict spread to Taraba State, where members of the Jukun ethnic group allegedly attacked local Tiv, driving them into Benue state. Twenty-five people were reported killed in that attack and 25,000 Tiv fled Taraba for camps on Benue and Nasarawa.

16. (C) Comment: Most disconcerting are the reports of the Army's lethal brutality. If true, this will stain the Army and the Federal Government as severely as did the 1999 Odi massacre. Tiv leaders allege that their people are de facto being expelled from Nasarawa and Taraba--what they call ethnic cleansing--even though Tiv have resided there for nearly two centuries. We have no evidence of a conscious plot to expel the Tiv, and certainly have no evidence that the Nasarawa and Taraba state governments are involved. However, the two state governments have done little to halt this Tiv displacement. Still, this conflict cannot be as one sided as the Tiv leadership represents. The Tiv allege that the Army has sided with the Jukun, and that Minister of Defense Danjuma (ethnically a Tiv but raised as a Jukun) has provided the Jukun militia with arms. The Jukun allege that General Malu is doing the same for the Tiv. We cannot confirm these assertions.

17. (C) Comment cntd.: That General Malu (an ethnic Tiv) may have been targeted by his former troops adds another twist to this tragedy. General Malu, the author of the Odi massacre, may not be expected to take this passively, and violence in Benue, as well as a looming humanitarian disaster, is likely to continue. End Comment.

Jeter